(a) the steps being taken by Government to give practical shape to the declaration of the Ganga as the National River;

(b) whether there is also a proposal to stop some ongoing projects; and

(c) the measures being initiated to get public cooperation in order to make this plan successful?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF WATER RESOURCES (SHRI JAY PRAKASH NARAYAN YADAV): (a) and (c) The Central Government has initiated an exercise for revamping the river conservation strategy with an aim to promote a holistic and integrated approach of river basin planning. The process for setting up a River Basin Authority for River Ganga as an empowered, planning, implementing & monitoring Authority, vested with appropriate powers has been initiated in consultation with the Central Ministries and the State Governments.

(b) There is no proposal in the Ministry of Water Resources (MoWR) to stop ongoing projects. However, taking note of the concerns raised by some NGO's regarding construction of Hydro Power Schemes on the river Ganga, the National Thermal Power Corporation (NTPC) has constituted a High Level Expert Group to examine the various issues involved. The State Government of Uttarakhand has reportedly put on hold two hydro power projects namely Bhaironghati and Pala Maneri.

Impact of terrorism on tourist arrival in India

*304. SHRI KAMAL AKHTAR:
DR. V. MAITREYAN:

Will the Minister of TOURISM be pleased to state:

(a) what is the present level of tourist arrivals in the country;

(b) what is the corresponding figures during the last year;

(c) whether the arrival of tourists has been severely affected due to the security problem in the country on account of terrorists activities in the country; and

(d) what serious measures are being contemplated to improve the security in the country to facilitate the tourist arrivals in the country?

THE MINISTER OF TOURISM (SHRIMATI AMBIKA SONI): (a) to (d) The number of Foreign Tourist Arrivals (FTAs) in India during January-November 2008 is estimated at 4.84 million, which is higher than the FTAs of 4.48 million during January-November 2007. However, the growth rate in FTAs during January-November 2008 over the corresponding period of 2007 is only 8% as compared to growth rate of 14.8% in FTAs during January-November 2007 over the corresponding period of 2006. The lower growth rate in 2008 may be due to various reasons including the global financial meltdown and terrorist activities. To minimize the negative impact of recent terrorist attacks on tourism in the country, the Ministry of Tourism has undertaken the following confidence building measures:-

- All States have been requested to beef up security measures in hotels and at tourist sites in their respective States;

- India tourism offices overseas are in regular contact with the international media and travel trade to keep them updated on the ground situation in the country.

Upgradation of refineries

*305. SHRI MAHENDRA MOHAN:
SHRIMATI SHOBHANA BHARTIA:

Will the Minister of PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS be pleased to state:

(a) whether the public sector oil companies propose to upgrade their refineries and to equip them to process high sulphur crude oil to cut their import bill;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) the existing refining capacity of each of the refineries of the public sector oil companies and whether these capacities have been fully utilized in the last few years; and

(d) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS (SHRI MURLI DEORA): (a) and (b) The Public Sector Oil Companies are progressively increasing the processing of High Sulphur crude oil. Apart from the refineries designed for indigenous low Sulphur crude oil processing namely, the North Eastern Refineries (Digboi, Guwahati, Bongaigaon & Numaligarh), Indian Oil Corporation Limited (IOCL)-Barauni (part), IOCL-Gujarat (part) and Chennai Petroleum Corporation Limited (CPCL)-Nagapattinam, most of the refineries are equipped to process High Sulphur crude oil.

The Public Sector Oil Companies are regularly undertaking refinery upgradation projects for installation of high severity Fluidised Catalytic Converter, Delayed Coker Unit, Coker Hydrotreater Unit, etc. to optimize high sulphur crude oil processing based on economics, pollution levels and product demand. Moreover, Fuel quality upgradation projects are presently being executed at the refineries of the Public Sector Oil Companies to meet the stringent Environmental Norms. The High Sulphur Crude processing capability is expected to go up after these projects commissioning.

(c) and (d) Most of the refineries (except North Eastern refineries and CPCL-Nagapattinam) have achieved improved capacity utilization over the years. Half of the number of refineries have achieved full capacity (100%) utilization and overall industry average for the last three years has exceeded 100% capacity utilization.

The details of installed capacity, actual crude processed and capacity utilization by PSU refineries during last three years (2005-06, 2006-07 and 2007-08) are given in the statement.